

Position paper

WHAT DOES THE REFUGEE COUNCIL BADEN-WUERT-TEMBERG (BW) THINK ABOUT THE WORD “integration”?

*Politicians and other people often talk about “integration.” But these people do not explain what the word “integration” means. Many people use the word “integration” to say that **migrantized people** must do certain things..*

*A **migrantized person** is a person with a migration background. People “migrantize” other people when they say: “You have a different culture. You are different from us.” This can happen to people who were born and raised in Germany.*

We believe this idea of “integration” is wrong. In this text, we explain why we feel this way and share our own ideas.

***Note:** We use quotation marks around the word “integration” because we believe the term is wrong.*

What do people in politics and the media say about “integration”?

Many people use the word “integration” to say that migrantized people must do specific things, like learning German or getting a job. These people also say that migrantized people should be like the people from **the dominant society**.

Dominant society means: the part of society that many people think of as “normal.” Examples are: white people, heterosexual people, and male people. People from these groups often have a lot of power in society.

Migrantized people must fulfill certain ideas. Only then will people from the dominant society accept them. If they don’t, people from the dominant society say: Migrantized

people do not want to “integrate.”

Why are we against this idea of “integration”?

We criticize this idea of “integration.” Here is why:

- When people from the dominant society talk about “integration,” they are telling migrantized people, “You are different from us.” They use the words “you” and “we.” They are saying there are two groups in society: people from the dominant society and migrantized people. But that is wrong. There are many different people in society. There are not just two groups, where everyone in one group is the same.

- In a democratic society, there are many different ways of life. The Basic Law defines the core values that exist in Germany. We ask: Are there other values, beyond the Basic Law, that apply to all people in Germany? We believe the answer is no. All people in Germany have very different values. These depend on their family situation, work, income, and interests - not just on their origin.

- Some people can do a lot in shaping society, while others can do very little. Migrantized people often have little say. One reason for this is racism. The demand for “integration” ignores this fact. Many migrantized people call for more social and political rights. People from the dominant society use these demands to say, “You can stay in Germany only if you meet specific expectations,” like speaking German and having a job.

This is a shift in argument: Migrantized people want more **participation** for everyone, like the right to education. But instead they get the pressure to achieve certain goals, like a certain level of German. This leads to more injustice in society, and not just for migrantized people.

participation means being involved and helping to shape society.

- Society consists of various-areas: work, health, housing, and others. Everyone is included or excluded from these areas of society to different degrees. This is also true for people who live in Germany since birth. The reason for this is that each person has different advantages, resources, relationships, and so on. So there can be no single way to “integrate” into society as a whole.

We also find the very idea of “integration” very harmful. Here are the reasons why:

- The concept of “integration” creates a difference between „us“ and “them.” The divide is often the (assumed) culture of the other person. People from the dominant society often say, “Someone different is bad, or their culture is bad. These people do not belong in society.”
- Power in society is not shared equally. There are people who have many advantages and more power. Some of these people judge the lives of people with less power. They say, “You have to integrate.” They say this even if the people they speak about have already settled well in Germany. For example, they have an apartment or a job. When people talk about “integration,” they are demonstrating their power. They are saying that they are better than people with less power. This is called **neocolonialist** behavior..

Colonialism refers to the past, when European countries exploited other countries in the world. They called them as “colonies.” They treated people there as lesser. For example, there was trade in human slaves.

Neo-colonialism means that colonialism still impacts how people think and act today, for example, through racism.

Is it wrong to use the word “integration”?

There are good reasons for avoiding the word “integration”:

- Many people use the word as a **“battle cry” term**.

“Battle cry” term People use a word to summarize a situation in one word. The word greatly simplifies situations. People often use “battle cry” terms to convince others of a (political) idea. .

- The word “integration” causes division in society.

However, in some situations, we still use the word “integration”:

- Laws and court decisions often refer to “integration.” When we talk about these laws or decisions, we sometimes use the word. There are some positive court decisions about

“integration.” These decisions strengthen the rights of migrantized people.

- Some people publicly say that migrantized people are bad. They do this, for example, to gain support for their political party. It sometimes helps to remind these people of something: In sociology, the word “integration” describes different processes in society. Everyone must help to make “integration” a success. No matter where they come from or how long they have been in Germany.

Sociology: is a type of science. It examines how people live together.

In these situations, we use the word “integration,” but we use it critically. This means we explain what is difficult about the word “integration.”

- In counseling, we often talk about laws. The laws often refer to “integration.” We are especially careful with the word “integration” in counseling. It can be very hurtful to migrantized people. It makes people think, “I am not as good as other people” or “I have to do more to belong.” However, we want to say to everyone who contacts us, “You belong here. You are good enough just the way you are.”

What alternatives are there to the word “integration”?

We want all people to live together peacefully. That’s why we prefer to talk about participation instead of “integration.”

The goals of participation are:

- All people have the same rights and opportunities.
- All people can participate in all parts of society. No one should be excluded

Participation is a better word than “integration” because:

- The word participation says: There are structures in society. These structures make it easier or more difficult for people to participate
- The word participation is neutral. It does not say what is right or wrong behavior

We also like using the words “arrival” or “have arrived.” We use them when we talk about people, who have only recently started living in Germany. These words show that people can participate in society.

Summary: So what is our opinion?

We try to avoid using the word “integration” as much as we can. When we do use it, we talk about it critically.

But we also believe that avoiding the word “integration” is not enough. We want to see big changes in society. We want more people to question the idea of “integration.” We also want to see less inequality.

We demand all people should have the same social and political rights. Everyone must be able to participate in society.

We believe that participation is a task for society as a whole. Society includes the state and all the people who live in it. Everyone in society must work together on participation. The state must create good laws. These laws must make participation possible for all people. This includes people who have only recently come to live in Germany. We believe that the state can do many things better about this. The state prevents many refugees from participating in society. For example, the state does not allow them to work or gives asylum seekers few social benefits.

Living together in a country means everyone has to adapt. When we talk about migration, this means that everyone has to adapt and change. It doesn't matter how long they have been in Germany. People from the dominant society also have to participate. They can do two important things:

- They can be open to people who have only recently arrived in Germany. This also means that they should make it possible for everyone to participate in the organizations, groups, and structures.
- They can think about their **privileges**. They can give up some privileges. Then other people can participate more.

Privileges: mean advantages and opportunities. Some people, for example white people, have certain privileges because of their position in society.

When people live together in this way, society as a whole becomes better.

You can find more information here:

- Annette Treibel (2015): Integriert euch? Plädoyer für ein selbstbewusstes Einwanderungsland
- Michael Bommers (2007): Integration – gesellschaftliches Risiko und politisches Symbol – Essay, In: Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte
- Deutscher Caritasverband e.V. (2018): Fact Sheet. Begriffserklärung Integration und Inklusion
- Max Czollek (2020): Desintegriert euch!
- Manuela Bojadžijev (2012): Die windige Internationale. Rassismus und Kämpfe der Migration.